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SUBJECT: COLOMBIA DISPUTES AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT ON
LABOR

¶1. Summary: Amnesty International (AI) released a report on July 3 criticizing the GOC's record on combating violence against trade unions. The report accused the Colombian military of maintaining links with former paramilitary groups that used terror tactics against unionists. It also criticized the GOC for not making significant progress in reducing killings of labor unionists and addressing impunity. The GOC said the document ignored GOC efforts to protect unionists and prosecute perpetrators of violence. It also charged the report used outdated and inaccurate data, and noted AI did not seek GOC input. End Summary

GOC POINTS OUT FLAWS, DISPUTES CLAIMS

¶2. AI's July 3 report said the Colombian military maintained links with paramilitary groups and accused the GOC of not doing enough to protect unionists and combat impunity. Minister of Social Protection Diego Palacio Betancourt issued a statement, posted on the Presidency's web site on July 4, criticizing AI for publishing a report with numerous factual errors and for failing to seek GOC input. The 59-page AI report entitled "Killings, Arbitrary Detentions, and Death Threats: the Reality of Trade Unionism in Colombia" included examples of labor killings and recommendations to the GOC as well as the international community.

¶3. Betancourt said AI never met with the GOC to verify any of the information they cite or to discuss the programs the GOC has in place to battle violence against unionists. He rejected AI's claim that a relationship persists between the armed forces and the former paramilitaries. The AI document quotes a report by the ENS as saying that 77 unionists were killed in 2006, but Betancourt said the ENS report they cited registered 72. He said the GOC reports 60 unionist murders in 2006, and clarified that not all of those were killed because of their union affiliations.

¶4. Betancourt said AI selectively chose its date ranges for statistics to produce the most dramatic results. When calculating the number of murders, Amnesty cited numbers up until April, 2007, but when referring to convictions of murderers, AI only cited the number achieved up until 2004. Betancourt said this hides major advances in the past few years. For example, AI's document reported there had not been a single conviction in a case of unionist homicide. The most recent update from the GOC reports there have been 48 cases resolved, with 89 individuals jailed since 2002.

¶5. Betancourt also said that Amnesty emphasized killings committed by former paramilitary groups, while not adequately addressing those committed by guerrilla groups like the

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). He said that, while paramilitaries are mentioned on nearly every page of the report, Amnesty International only dedicated one and a half pages to discussing violence perpetrated by the FARC. Betancourt's letter said ENS attributes 285 of the murders from 1991 to 2006 to the paramilitaries and 147 to guerrilla groups (in the majority of cases, the responsible party is unknown). He suggested the killings committed by guerrillas merited further emphasis by AI.

GOC CITES PROGRESS, INCREASED EFFORTS

¶6. Betancourt said whether one uses GOC statistics or ENS statistics, murders of unionists fell by over 60 percent from 2002-2006. (Note: ENS reports two more unionists were killed in 2006 than in 2005, but ENS and GOC show the same overall downward trend during the period-- see table below.) Betancourt also pointed out that, in accordance with the tripartite agreement brokered by the International Labor Organization and signed by the GOC, industry leaders, and the labor confederations, the GOC set up a special unit within the National Prosecutor's office (Fiscalia) to investigate violence against unionists. This unit has nearly 100 investigators and prosecutors.

¶7. He also said the Ministry of Interior and Justice's protection program currently protects 1504 union leaders. According to Betancourt, GOC resources dedicated to this effort have risen substantially since 2000. The program's budget for 2007 was over USD \$34 million. He called on AI to recognize these achievements in their report.

Table: Unionist Murders from 2001 to 2006
Sources: Ministry of Social Protection and ENS

	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	% Change '01 - '06
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ENS:	197	186	94	96	70	72	63.4%
MSP:	205	196	101	89	40	60	70.7%

Drucker